

To the Right Reverend & Lord Bishop of St Asaph

A SERIOUS

<sup>4125</sup>  
C A L L

TO

REPENTANCE,

AND

*Amendment of Life;*

Occasion'd by the

Contagious Distemper,

WHICH

Has continued a considerable Time among the  
CATTLE, in many Parts of this Kingdom;

AND

By other remarkable Tokens of God's Displeasure,  
which have lately appeared.

K P. W.

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L O N D O N:

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JONAH, Ch. i. v. 7.

*And they said every one to his Fellow, come and let us cast Lots, that we may know for whose Cause this Evil is upon us. So they cast Lots, and the Lot fell upon Jonah.*

**T**HE Prophet *Jonah* having disobeyed the Command of God in flying to *Joppa*, and taking Ship for *Tarshish*, instead of going to *Nineveh*, to warn the sinful Inhabitants thereof of the Destruction that at the End of Forty Days was to overwhelm them, God pursued him to the Sea, and raised a mighty Tempest to awaken him into an Acknowledgment of his Sin, which excited such a Fear in the Mariners, that in their Distress, they cried, every Man to his God for Deliverance, and used all other Means they could devise for the Preservation of their Lives: And when all they had done prov'd ineffectual, they began to bethink themselves, that this outrageous Tempest, which threatened Ruin and Death every Moment, might be the Effect of God's Vengeance, pursuing some one among them, guilty of some crying Sin, for which the Winds and Waves did so fiercely swell and rage against them: And they said one to another, come let us cast Lots, that we may know for whose Cause this Evil is come upon us. When the Sea was calm, and the Danger of Death out



of their Sight, there was nothing in the Ship but Jollity and Mirth; their Sins were then the same as in the Storm, but they did not trouble themselves to reason about them, or to pray for the Continuance of fair Weather; but when Death stared them in the Face, then they presently cry out, Let us find out the Sinner for whose sake this Evil is come upon us.

There is no such faithful Remembrancer as Affliction, nothing so powerful to call the Conscience home, to awaken it, and bring it to a Sight and Acknowledgment of its Sins, as the Fear of Death; it rouses up the Memory, and makes it recollect, and bring to Mind many Actions of the Life past, which it would willingly have forgotten, many Sins which it could wish were buried in Oblivion. This Distress is come upon us, say the Brethren of *Joseph* one to another, in that we saw the Anguish of our Brother's Soul without Pity. It was twenty Years since they sold their Brother into Bondage, and had never before shewed any Remorse for that unnatural and cruel Action; but now, since the same injurious Usage was brought home to themselves, and it was become their own Case, their Consciences, as faithful Monitors, brought to their remembrance the hard and unjust treatment they had dealt to their poor Brother; and as *Adonibezek* said, as they had done to him, so they seemed to think God had requited them, and required their Brother's Blood at their Hands. Afflictions are like a Rack, they extort from us an Acknowledgment of those Crimes, which we have been smothering and keeping down  
for



for many Years. When Troubles or Sickneſs come upon us, we are forced to look about us, to deſcend into ourſelves, and examine the Actions of our paſt Lives, to ſee what we have done amiſs, wherein we have offended, and deſerve to be thus corrected; and when they have done the Part for which they were ſent, when they have brought forth the peaceable Fruits of Righteouſneſs; when we have forſaken our Sins, and amended our Lives, and become wiſer and better, then doubtleſs they will be removed. God never willingly grieves the Children of Men; and whenever he does ſo, he does it becauſe he ſees it beſt for them; when gentle Methods do not move, or work any good Effect, then it is that he ſends his avenging Viſitations to ſtir up Men's Remembrance, to bring them to themſelves, and to a Senſe of their Duty. The Prophet tells us, when the Judgments of God are in the Earth, the Inhabitants of the World will learn Righteouſneſs; that is certainly the Deſign for which God ſends them; that the Effect which he expects from them. The gentle Admonitions of Afflictions ſent upon particular Perſons, are the ſtill Voice of divine Patience, calling Sinners to Repentance; and the Publick and National Calamities of Famine, War, or Peſtilence, are the louder Calls, and as it were the Thunder of the Almighty's Threatenings, to awaken Mankind from their Inſenſibility, and to rouse up a vitious and debauched World. When God viſits the Earth with any of theſe ſore Calamities, we are all ready to confeſs, that our Sins and Wick-edneſſes have drawn down that Judgment upon us. The Mariners in the Ship readily acknowledg'd  
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the Hand of God to be in the Storm, and that it was raised to avenge the Impieties of some one sinful Wretch among them ; but no one of them would confess himself to be that Sinner : When it comes to a particular Enquiry who it is that troubleth the Ship, every Man is partial to himself ; he excuses and extenuates his own Faults ; he will not take any Share of the publick Guilt, but shifts off the Load from himself to his Neighbour, like the Apostles to their Master, who assured them that one of them would betray him ; one says, is it I ? And another says, is it I ? Not one of them will confess himself to be the Traytor. Not one of us will confess himself to be the Sinner, tho' every Man may say to himself, as *Nathan* said to *David*, *Thou art the Man*. Let *Adam* be his own Judge, and he will easily answer for himself, the Woman tempted him to Sin : Let the Woman judge for herself, and she will quickly shift off the Guilt from herself upon the Serpent : Let every Man be his own Judge, and he will soon acquit himself ; so there will not be one guilty Person found. None indeed are so shameless to say, they have no Sin at all ; yet few will freely confess that they are grievous Sinners ; they are content to pass for Sinners in the Crowd, but their Sins, they say, are not of such a Size, as to distinguish them from their Neighbours, or so bad that they should be the Butt and Mark against which the Arrows of God's Anger are levelled.

The Mischief of this proceeds not only from Men's looking upon their own Faults with too partial Eyes, but from the favourable Construc-  
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tion some Sins bear in the World. There is nobody can help observing, that some Sins, which are not only vile and odious in their Nature, but also pernicious in their Consequences, pass for Acts of Gallantry, and are so far from raising Indignation and Abhorrence, that they meet with very little Blame and Censure. I wish I could not say they often meet with Approbation and Applause. The reason of which seems to be this; Men live so long in an habituated course of Sin, and make it so familiar to them, that they come at length to think there is little or no Depravity in it: Yea, the more common any Sin is, Men commit it with less Reluctance, and run into it by Imitation and Example. For Custom, we see, strangely lessens the Guilt of any Sin, and wears off by Degrees all Sense of the Malignity of it. This Deceit, which Men love to put upon themselves, has such a fatal Influence upon Practice, that they make no Scruple to be notoriously guilty of some vile Sins, and yet account themselves Sinners of a low Degree, and not at all Instrumental in drawing down God's Judgments upon a Nation. The Mariners, we may be allowed to think, were guilty of the common Vices of the Times, and yet they did not apprehend that God had manifested his fierce Displeasure in so raging a Storm upon that Account; they judged it must be a Sin of a deeper Stain and Dye that had raised his Anger up to such a Height. Come, say they, let us cast Lots, that we may know for whose Cause this Evil is come upon us. And accordingly the Text tells us, they cast Lots. This Method of casting Lots, which the Mariners had now recourse to,



to, was much in Use among the *Jews*, of which we have some Instances in the Old and New Testament ; and it was a manifest referring the Issue to God's Determination. Thus the two Goats were brought before the High-Priest, that he might cast Lots, and determine which was to be sacrificed, and which was to escape into the Wilderness. Thus the Land of *Canaan* was divided, and a Portion of it assigned to each Tribe. Thus *Saul* was chosen to be King, and *Matthias* into the Apostleship. All which were so constantly believed to be of God's immediate Assignment, as to give Occasion to that Aphorism of *Solomon*. *Prov.* xvi, v. 33. ' the Lot is cast into the Lap, ' but the whole disposing is of the Lord.' And thus, in the Instance before us, God manifestly directed the Lot to fall upon the right Person ; and the Lot fell upon *Jonah*.

Now *Jonah*'s Eyes begin to be open, and now he sees at the same Time his Folly and his Punishment. Now he sees how dear his Sinful Flight is like to cost him, and what are the bitter Fruits of yielding to the Counsels of his own naughty and distrustful Heart. And this is the certain and determined End that all Rash and Sinful Actions must sooner or later center in ; if Men will fly from God, and break loose from the Boundaries of Reason, and the Rules of Religion, however they may prosper for a while, however secure and safe they may think themselves, yet they and their vain Devices, shall in the End be dashed in Pieces and brought to nothing ; if they will live without God, they shall be sure, when they come to die, to feel the

the Hand they have slighted fall heavy upon them. We may see in *Jonah* with how much ado it is before God can melt the hard and disobedient Heart of Man, and bring him to Repentance ; he must stand in his Way and cross him, he must terrify <sup>him</sup> with the Waves and Storms of his Displeasure, and drench him in the Sea of Affliction, before he can thoroughly humble him ; and extort from him a Confession and Acknowledgement of his Sinful Ways. O that Men were as wise to prevent the coming of a Storm, as they are diligent to allay it when it is come upon them, that they were as careful to avert the Judgments of God, by breaking off their Sins by Righteousness, as they are Earnest in deprecating and crying mightily for the Removal of them, when they are under the Smart of them ; that they would acknowledge God, Revere and Adore his Power, and not stay to be plagued for their Infidelity with the *Ægyptian* Sorcerers, and then be forced to cry out, this is the Finger of God. Who would now expect that this disobedient Man, whose fullen and obdurate Heart had stood out so long, till the Lot had singled him out, should Escape with his Life ? There was Mercy still in Store for him : God intended to correct him, but not to cast him away ; he suffered the Mariners to throw him into the Sea, but would not suffer the Waves to drown him. What a Signal Instance is this Man both of the Justice and the Mercy of God ; of his Justice in punishing ; of his Mercy in saving him ! God has a thousand Ways to deal with, and chastise the impenitent Sinner ; he will cross him and Afflict him, he will lead him thro' the Thorny Ways of Sicknes and Troubles



to humble him, and if these Methods fail to reclaim him, then he cuts him off. But as soon as he repents and turns from his Evil Ways, how soon doth he withdraw his Anger? How merciful and Compassionate is he to them that Fear him? As soon as we throw away Sin, that accursed Thing, from us. As soon as he that troubleth the Ship is thrown into the Sea, the Raging of the Tempest ceases, and the Winds and Waves are Calm and Still. Who would be backward to Repent and return to God, where there is so much Love and Mercy in Store for him! Are we great and grievous Sinners? So were *David* and *Peter*; the one fell into the terrible Offences of Adultery and Murder, the other deny'd his Master! Let us but do as they did, wash away our Sins by timely Repentance and Amendment, and we shall be forgiven in as speedy a Way as they were. Are we in Distress and Misery? So was *Jonah*, in the Extremity of Despair in the Belly of the Fish! Let us with him cry mightily unto God, and put our full Trust in him, and he will work a speedy Way for our Deliverance.

But let us now see what Use we ourselves are to make of the Words before us; we have no need to cast Lots to find out the Sinner for whose Cause this dreadful Evil, this great Contagion that has raged with deadly Influence thro' most Parts of the Kingdom, is come upon us. Let us but begin the Search at Home, descend into ourselves, examine into the Conduct of our past Lives, call to Remembrance our Sins and Offences, the Customary and Common Sins that we have been daily guilty of,  
and



and we shall soon discover the Sinner, soon see great Reason to apply the Words of the Prophet *Nathan* each to ourselves, *thou art the Man* who has been Instrumental in drawing down this heavy Calamity upon us. And when we have set our Sins in this impartial View before us, shall we not take a Step further, and cry out with penitent *David*, we have Sinned against the Lord? Thou Lord has chastened us for our Iniquities, but be pleased in Mercy to us to stay thy avenging Hand, and remove thy heavy Wrath from us, that hath almost consumed us. If this be our Behaviour, if we humble ourselves before our offended God, and fly to him by sincere Repentance and Amendment of our Sinful Lives, we may have Reason to hope that God in Mercy to us, will put away our Sins, and remove this Death from us. Let the Behaviour of the *Ninevites* upon *Jonah's* proclaiming God's threatening Message, be an Instruction and an Example to us. The People of *Nineveh* believed God, and proclaimed a Fast and put on Sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them; for Word came to the King of *Nineveh*, and he arose from his Throne, and laid his Robe from him, and covered him with Sackcloth and sat in Ashes, and caused it to be proclaimed and published through *Nineveh*, saying, let neither Man nor Beast, Herd, nor Flock taste any Thing, let them not Feed or drink Water, but let Man and Beast be covered with Sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every one from his Evil Way, and from the Violence that is in their Hands. This was their Behaviour, this their Humiliation and Repentance. If they continued in their Sins ob-

durate and impenitent, they saw inevitable Destruction before their Eyes ; their very Days were numbered. What had they then left to do, but to try a contrary Course, and see what the Event of that would be ? for who can tell say they, if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce Anger, that we perish not ? and we see the Event did not deceive them ; and God saw their Works that they turned from their Evil Ways, and God repented of the Evil that he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not.

Can we Christians read this History, and observe how these blind *Gentiles* were converted, and obeyed the very first Call, without our Hearts reproaching us for having disobeyed so many loud repeated Calls from the Word of God, and resisted all his gracious Methods that might either force or allure us to Repentance ?

The People of *Nineveh* were only threatned, yet they immediately threw themselves upon the Mercy of God, and brake off their Sins by Righteousness and Amendment of their Lives. We have been stricken and smitten of God, and visited with a most grievous and destroying Contagious Distemper among the Cattle, which still rages in many Parts of this Kingdom. Now if any one should ask what are the Fruits that this Visitation of God hath produced, can we Answer that we have turned every one from our Evil Ways, and from the Violence that is in our Hands ? Can we say that we have forsaken our Habitual and Customary Sins, our Pride and Uncharitableness, our Envy  
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and Malice, our Lying and Slandering, Drunkenness, Whoredoms, Adulteries, &c? Have we, whom the distinguishing Goodness of God hath hitherto preserved in many remarkable Instances, had a due Sense of this great Mercy? If we have paid him no Sacrifice of Thanks and Praise, nor lived more to his Glory, if none of these good Effects have followed, then in vain hath God given us this kind Warning, and we have Reason to Fear that we shall be involved in the same Calamity, which from the Experience of former Times, we may too justly apprehend, will bring on the like or worse Judgments upon us.

But this is not all that we have to fear from an offended God.

If a sad foreboding Thought, a Forerunner of what may come upon us, fills the Mind with Anxiety and Anguish, the painful Remembrance should rouse us to Repentance, and fix serious and lasting Impressions on our Hearts. We have had of late loud awakening Calls from above; the Lord also thundred out of Heaven, and the Almighty gave his Voice. Why did the Earth tremble and quake; why did the Foundations of the Hills shake! Was it not because the Almighty Governor of the World was wroth? Where is the Man among us so innocent and good, that has the Courage to say with *David*, tho' the Earth be moved, and tho' the Hills be carried into the midst of the Sea, I will not fear? If we cannot say with the same Confidence as he did, God is our Refuge and Strength, our present Help in Trouble,



ble, if our reproaching Hearts do not speak Peace unto us ; then let us from a deep Sense of our own Unworthiness look up unto to God, and cry, our Flesh trembleth for fear of thee, O just and righteous God ! and we are afraid of thy Judgments.---Judgments that hang over our guilty Heads upon a slender Thread, easily snapt asunder ; and we have no other Way left to avert the impending Blow, but by turning to God with all our Hearts, and utterly forsaking all our evil Ways. It is therefore high Time to awake out of our Insensibility to a Life of Righteousness ; for what at present are our Deservings that can stop the Hand of God from falling heavily upon us !----When a Nation is over-run with a Torrent of Vice and every Kind of Wickedness ; when his sacred Name is hourly Blasphemed ; when his revealed Will, which he has given us as a Guide and Rule for all our Actions, is insulted and derided, with the impious Scoffs and Raillery of daring Infidels ; would it be any Wonder, if God should visit such a Nation as this in Anger ? Nay, is it not a greater Wonder, and what should raise in us an Admiration of his Goodness and Forbearance, that he has yet withheld his Hand, and not poured out the Vials of his Wrath upon us ? If we make not a right Use of God's Patience and Forbearance ; if we let not the Time past of our Lives suffice to have wrought the Will of our unruly Appetites, in vain will it be then, that God has given so many kind Warnings ; whether we make Use of them or not, our Time of Respite will run out ; whether it be for Days, or Weeks, or Months, it will come to an End at God's appoint-  
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ed Time; and happy shall we be, if it finds us ready and prepared for our Change: But if it finds us still in an unrepented State, the lengthening out of Life will but enhance our Punishment; and it will be to little Purpose to have escaped one Tempest, if we are to sink at last in another. If this is sure to be our Case, then let us be so wise as to strike in with the present Opportunity, and while Time is in our Hands, and the Day before us, lay in a Stock of Comforts and Graces that will give us Peace of Mind, when we shall stand most in need of them. But let us make what Use we will, God will call for an Account of the Improvements we have made, of the frequent Admonitions that have been given us, tho' we may think him slow and long in coming, he will surely come, and at his own Time make us full Payment.

What have we therefore left to do, or can we do a wiser Thing, than to tread in the Steps, and follow the Example of the People of *Nineveh*; and give the same sincere Tokens of our Humiliation and Repentance, as they did! Happy People! who had a Respite of Forty Days allowed them! Happier still, in improving that short Time so as to escape the threatened Ruin! Whether we shall have a Respite of Days, or Weeks, or Months, is only known to the Great Disposer of our Lives; but still this is our Comfort, that we have a merciful God to deal with, who desireth not the Death of Sinners, but rather that they would return to him by Repentance, and be saved. Life and Death are before us, and we  
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may choose which we will ; and as our Choice is here, such will be the Fruits of it hereafter. They who repent with *Nineveh*, and forsake their sins, shall find Mercy with her ; and they who sin on with Choice and Deliberation, in Contempt of the frequent Calls and Admonitions to Repentance, shall, at God's appointed Time, have Judgment without Mercy.

That God's Blessing may accompany this Discourse, is the sincere Desire of the Author

W. P.

*William Powell D.D.*  
*D. and A. Arch.*





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